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Panel grills CNO pick on scandals, carrier

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Recent reports of misconduct in a combat zone and alcohol and drug abuse by Navy SEALs forced Vice Adm. Michael Gilday to answer some tough questions Wednesday during his Senate confirmation hearing to be the next chief of naval operations.

Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee wanted to know from Gilday what he would do about such behavior if he were to become the service's next CNO.

Gilday said the incidents are being investigated and he would deal with the root causes behind them and hold people accountable.

"If there is a problem with the culture of the community, [it will be] addressed very quickly and very firmly," he said.

During the hearing, Sen. Gary Peters, D-Mich., highlighted the recent return of a Navy SEAL platoon from Iraq midway through their deploy-

ment because they were accused of drinking in the combat zone as well as an allegation of sexual assault by a senior enlisted member of the team, according to a New York Times report. Peters also referred to another report of members from another SEAL team who allegedly used cocaine and told investigators that military drug tests are a joke.

"These issues seem not to be isolated to one team and are being reported from units stationed in California and Virginia, which certainly raises a level of concern," Peters said.

Sen. Jack Reed, of Rhode Island, the ranking Democrat on the committee, said the Navy's core values that include leadership, protecting subordinates, and selfless service are called into question given the accusations against the SEALs.

Gilday said ethics are important and they start with leadership and extend down through the ranks in order to make certain that sailors bring their values to work.

Gilday said he was committed to having the Navy treat people with dignity and respect and he will try to set the best example from the top.

The three-star admiral is the director of the Joint Staff, a position he has held since March. If confirmed as CNO, he would be promoted to a four-star admiral. President Donald Trump nominated him July 18 for the Navy's most senior military leadership position.

Trump's first selection for CNO, Adm. William Moran, had already been confirmed by the Senate for the position when he retired abruptly after reports last month that he had continued a professional relationship with Chris Servello, a former colleague who was removed from his position as a public affairs adviser to current CNO Adm. John Richardson in 2017 following accusations of sexual misconduct, according to The Associated Press. Servello had also worked for Moran as a public affairs officer.

Beyond the recent scandals

involving SEALs, Gilday faced questions during Wednesday's hearing about ongoing issues with the new USS Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier. Senators' questions focused on the ship's weapons elevators, arresting system for landing, aircraft catapult and dual band radar.

Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., chairman of the committee, pointed out the Navy accepted the Ford before the ship was complete, that it cost more than \$2.5 billion over budget and that it has untested equipment technology, and he cited its ongoing delays.

Gilday said he shared Inhofe's concern and assessment of the equipment issues on the Navy's new class of aircraft carrier, adding the service has made progress with the catapult, arresting system and radar. The next big hurdle to get the ship ready for deployment was with the weapons elevators, of which only two of the 11 are ready.

Navy secretary to rescind awards for prosecutors

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Navy Secretary Richard Spencer will rescind the military awards given to the prosecutors in the court-martial of Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer Edward Gallagher after President Donald Trump directed him to do so, a Navy official said Wednesday.

"The (Navy) secretary is going to pull the awards and he does have the authority to do that," said a Navy official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the matter.

The official said he did not know when Spencer would rescind the awards, which were given to all the prosecutors who worked on the Gallagher court-martial.

The announcement of the decision follows a tweet by Trump on Wednesday afternoon directing Navy leadership to take away the awards. The president tweeted the prosecutors were "ridiculously" given the Navy Achievement Medal.

"Not only did they lose the case, they had difficulty with respect to information that may have been obtained from opposing lawyers and for giving immunity in a totally incompetent fashion," Trump wrote.

"I have directed the Secretary of the Navy Richard Spencer & Chief of Naval Operations John Richardson to immediately withdraw and rescind the awards."

The Navy Achievement Medal is given for performance.

The four attorneys serving as the prose-

cution in the Gallagher court-martial were given the medal for "superb results" and "expert litigation," according to a report by Task and Purpose based on legal documents that the website obtained.

Gallagher was accused of committing several war crimes in 2017, including the killing of a wounded Islamic State combatant, during a deployment to Iraq. He was acquitted earlier this month of all but one charge, with the jury finding him guilty of posing with the body of the dead combatant in photos.

Gallagher was sentenced to a reduction in rank to E-6, docked pay for two months and four months in jail, which he had already served while waiting for the trial, according to The San Diego Union-Tribune.

Navy pilot is missing after Super Hornet crash in Calif.

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The pilot of a Navy Super Hornet from Strike Fighter Squadron 151 that crashed during a routine training flight over California's Death Valley was missing Thursday, nearly 24 hours after the jet wrecked in a national park adjacent to a massive Navy installation, officials said.

The Navy had no update Thursday morning on efforts to recover the pilot of the downed F/A-18E Super Hornet. Photographs from the scene showed the single-seat fighter jet to be a complete loss after the crash about 10 a.m. local time in a portion of Death Valley National Park known as Star Wars Canyon, a popular spot for tourists and photographers to watch military planes weave through desert ravines at high speed.

National Park officials said seven people in the area were injured during the crash. Park spokesman Patrick Taylor told NPR that those injuries were minor.

The jet crash occurred just miles from Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, a sprawling Navy installation about 125 miles north of Los Angeles in the Mojave Desert. The service has used the China Lake base for missile and rocket development since the 1940s.

The jet was based at nearby Naval Air Station Lemoore, according to Naval Air Forces officials. They said an investiga-

tion into the cause of the crash was launched Wednesday.

Visitors told local news stations that the jet slammed into the canyon wall at high speed, sending billowing smoke into the air and shrapnel flying into a crowd nearby.

Local resident Aaron Cassell reported the crash from a resort about 10 miles away after seeing the smoke, he told The Associated Press.

"I just saw a black mushroom cloud go up," he told the news agency, comparing the impact to a bomb blast. "Typically, you don't see a mushroom cloud in the desert."

Cassell said he saw a second jet trailing the crashed Hornet pull up out of the canyon and circle the area. He told the AP that he did not see a parachute deploy from his vantage point.

While military planes do not typically fly over National Park land, pilots have flown through Star Wars Canyon since World War II. Officially, the chasm is called Rainbow Canyon but has been known by its nickname for decades because of colorful rock walls reminiscent of "Star Wars" hero Luke Skywalker's native planet of Tatooine, according to NPS.

A 2017 Associated Press profile of military flights through the gorge stated various jets fly 200 to 300 mph through the ravine, sometimes as low as 200 feet off the canyon floor, which is still several hundred feet below its top.

'Top Gun: Maverick' is Navy-approved, down to plot details

By NANCY MONTGOMERY

Stars and Stripes

What's Capt. Pete "Maverick" Mitchell been up to the past 32 years since the Navy fighter pilot first expressed his need for speed in 1986's highest-grossing film?

Why, as a rear admiral played by Ed Harris asks Maverick in the "Top Gun: Maverick" trailer released two weeks ago, is he still a captain despite more than 30 years of service and an unparalleled record shooting down enemy planes?

Cmdr. Ron Flanders, spokesman for Naval Air Forces in San Diego, can't, by contract, say.

"We'll probably have to see the movie to see what he's been doing," Flanders said.

Chances are it won't have been anything awful.

"The Navy did review the script so that A, it was accurate and B, was consistent with the ideals of the Navy," Flanders said.

The Defense Department has script approval rights, just as the military does over any movie that enlists its support. If the filmmakers decline to make changes desired by the

military, its support, such as access, equipment and troops, can be withdrawn.

In the first movie, the script originally called for Goose, Maverick's sidekick, to die in a midair collision, according to a 1986 story in Time magazine. The Navy said too many pilots were crashing so the script was changed to kill Goose as he tried to eject during a spinout.

According to a production assistance agreement for the upcoming film posted online by the Washington Business Journal, senior military staffers would "review with public affairs the script's thematics and weave in key talking points relevant to the aviation community" and be on set to provide and to "depict action scenes accurately."

Paramount has to reimburse the Navy for all costs "not aligned with current operations," such as flights not deemed to be providing training.

Flanders said there will be a lot of flying, and that pretty much all of it would be real.

"Whatever you're going to be seeing in 'Top Gun: Maverick,' that is the real deal," he said.

Rocket launcher found in NCO's airline baggage in Md.

The Capital Gazette

BALTIMORE — For the second time in two days, Baltimore Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport officials seized an inert launcher, this time described as a "rocket launcher," brought back as a souvenir early Thursday morning, according to a news release from the Maryland Office of the State Fire Marshal.

Along with TSA agents, the Fire Marshal's Bomb Squad and the Maryland Transportation Authority reported around 5:20 a.m. to the American Airlines baggage area where the launcher had been found. It was being brought back on a military flight by an Air Force sergeant as a memento for their service, according to the news release.

While the rocket launch tube presented no threat to anyone on the ground — it was empty of any explosive hazard and inspected by the U.S. military for safety, according to the news release — there was a slight chance it could contain pressurized gas so it wasn't allowed on the sergeant's connecting commercial flight.

The bomb squad took posses-

sion of the launcher until it can be safely returned to the owner, according to the news release.

While it is not uncommon for military personnel to return home with mementos from their tours of duty, it is important that they are made aware of the differing regulations for their connecting commercial flights versus their military flights, the news release said.

Data show toxins taint water near SC base

Associated Press

FORT JACKSON, S.C. — More than 16 percent of the drinking water wells tested near Fort Jackson over the past six years have shown contamination from a toxic chemical found in hand grenades used to train soldiers, according to recently released federal data.

In some cases, the pollution levels are high enough to exceed federal safety advisories for RDX — a chemical that can cause seizures and cancer in people from long-term exposure, The State reported. In other cases, RDX in private wells has fallen within safe drinking water limits, Army officials and state regulators

reported this week.

RDX is an ingredient in hand grenades that makes them explode. Fort Jackson officials estimated that soldiers throw 100,000 hand grenades a year at the base, but they think the pollution along Leesburg Road was caused from training soldiers decades ago.

But the finding of any RDX — royal demolition explosive — is a concern.

Matt Torkelson, a former drill sergeant and explosives inspector at Fort Jackson, said current training should not be dismissed as a possible source. The base's continued use of hand grenades is necessary, but it threatens water supplies,

he said.

"It can contribute to the continuation of groundwater contamination," Torkelson said. "We are talking about chemicals that can seep through the ground and sit there for an extended period before it gets rolled into groundwater."

Fort Jackson officials said they've taken measures to prevent RDX from flowing toward private wells, including treating soil with lime to neutralize the chemical. In addition, the base has supplied bottled water and installed water filtration systems.

The contaminant was found in groundwater at Fort Jackson six years ago as part of an

Army initiative to check bases for pollution from explosives. At first, the Army reported that it had not found unsafe levels in groundwater wells off the base. But further testing in 2014 found elevated levels of RDX in wells that served five homes across from Fort Jackson.

While the RDX issue has been identified in recent years, pollution on military bases is nothing new. Most recently, questions have surfaced about how pollutants known as perfluoroalkyl substances are affecting groundwater and drinking water in and around bases. Some types of these chemicals are contained in firefighting foam military bases have used.

N. Korean leader reportedly oversaw rocket system test

BY KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un oversaw the test of a new guided multiple rocket launcher system, state media reported Thursday, a move that could raise the threat to U.S. military bases and other targets in the South.

The report in the state-run Korean Central News Agency contradicted the assessment by South Korea's military, which said the North test-fired two short-range ballistic missiles off its eastern coast on Wednesday.

KCNA said Kim had guided the test-firing of a newly developed "large-caliber multiple launch guided rocket system."

The test confirmed that the "guided ordnance rocket reached the numerical values of its design, and verified the combat effectiveness of the overall system," KCNA said, adding that Kim repeatedly expressed satisfaction over the results.

"He said that it is very great and it would be an inescapable distress to the forces becoming a fat target of the weapon," it said.

The report didn't specify any targets, but North Korea is known to have hundreds of thousands of soldiers and massive artillery poised near the border, which is just 35 miles north of Seoul.

Some 28,500 American troops and thousands of family members and civilian employees are stationed in South Korea, which remains technically at war with the North since their 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice instead of a peace treaty.

The launch also came less than a week after the North fired two short-range ballistic missiles that it said served as a "solemn warning" to the South against joining the United States in joint military exercises and purchasing advanced jet fighters.

Photos released hours after Thursday's statement showed Kim watching a fiery rocket taking off, although the launcher was blurred out to make it difficult to determine characteristics.

The recent activity raises pressure on the U.S. as it tries to restart talks aimed at persuading the North to abandon its nuclear weapons.

SIGAR reports a decline in Afghan force strength

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghanistan's military and police forces' strength numbers have fallen to the lowest level since 2015, when NATO's Resolute Support mission began, a U.S. report said Thursday.

The sharp drop in personnel numbers may be linked to a new way of tallying staffing data, under which only those who have been biometrically validated in a new pay system are included, the report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction said.

The new Afghan Personnel and Pay System showed that the country's army and air force had 9,554 fewer personnel and the Afghan police nearly 25,000 fewer than reported to SIGAR last quarter.

The APPS was designed to prevent officials from pocketing the salaries of nonexistent soldiers and police, the report said. An ongoing SIGAR investigation into the payment of so-called "ghost" police found that in some cases, former police officers were still being paid "even if they have resigned,

been terminated, or killed," according to the report.

The Pentagon expects the new pay system to help protect U.S. funds, the report said. The U.S. pays for Afghan security forces personnel, with the exception of the base salaries of police, which are covered by a United Nations-managed multilateral fund.

Congress has appropriated more than \$82 billion to support security in Afghanistan, which represents nearly two-thirds of all U.S. reconstruction funding for the country since 2002.

The international community has agreed to fund 352,000 security personnel, but only 272,465 soldiers and police were on the books as of late May, a strength shortfall of around 20%, SIGAR said.

Afghan force strength has declined for four consecutive quarters, sinking to a record low since Resolute Support began, it said. The mission, focused on training and advising Afghans, replaced international combat operations in 2015.

The understaffing of Afghanistan's security forces comes as violence is rising even as the U.S. and Taliban are engaged in peace talks, the report said.

Debate tests Biden's front-runner strength

Associated Press

DETROIT — The ideological divisions gripping the Democratic Party intensified on Wednesday as presidential candidates waged an acrimonious battle over health care, immigration and race that tested the strength of early front-runner Joe Biden's candidacy.

The former vice president was repeatedly forced to defend his decades-old political record against pointed attacks from his younger, diverse rivals, who charged that Biden's eight-year relationship with President Barack Obama was not reason enough to earn the Democratic nomination.

The attacks on Biden in the second presidential debate were most vivid coming from California Sen. Kamala Harris, who declared that his willingness to work with segregationists in the U.S. Senate during the 1970s could have had dramatic consequences on the surge of minority candidates in political office. And, she said, it

could have prevented her and fellow presidential candidate Cory Booker, both of whom are black, from becoming senators.

"Had those segregationists had their way, I would not be a member of the United States Senate, Cory Booker would not be a member of the United States Senate, and Barack Obama would not have been in a position to nominate" Biden to become vice president, she said.

When pressed, Biden repeatedly leaned on his relationship with Obama.

"We're talking about things that occurred a long, long time ago," Biden said. "Everybody's talking about how terrible I am on these issues. Barack Obama knew who I was."

The dynamic showcased the challenges ahead for Biden and his party as Democrats seek to rebuild the young and multi-racial coalition that helped Obama win two presidential elections. Those differences were debated on a broad menu of issues

including health care, immigration and women's reproductive rights.

But it was the discussion of race that marked an escalating rift shaping the Democratic primary. At the same time, polls show that Biden has far more support from minority voters than his challengers, especially in the crucial early voting state of South Carolina.

Booker, who at times adopted the position of peacemaker, also took Biden to task over criminal justice issues and his role in passing a crime bill while a Delaware senator in the 1990s. When Biden fought back by criticizing Booker's tenure as mayor of Newark, N.J., before becoming a New Jersey senator, Booker shot back, "You're dipping into the Kool-Aid and you don't even know the flavor."

For Democrats, the internal fight, while common to almost every primary cycle, is one many would rather avoid, favoring instead a focus on defeating Trump.

Puerto Rico seeks new governor amid crisis

Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — Puerto Rico's governing party was in full-blown crisis Thursday as the nominee to succeed departing Gov. Ricardo Rossello headed to a disputed and uncertain confirmation vote in the U.S. territory's legislature.

Rossello is leaving Friday in the face of massive public protest and has nominated veteran politician and attorney Pedro Pierluisi to succeed him. Pierluisi is a former representative to the U.S. Congress seen by most ordinary Puerto Ricans as a con-

ciliatory, relatively uncontroversial figure, unlikely to be met by continued street demonstrations over poor governance and corruption.

Pierluisi would succeed Rossello if he's confirmed by the territorial House and Senate as secretary of state, the next in line to become governor under the Puerto Rican constitution. The post is currently vacant, and Rossello's New Progressive Party holds majorities in both chambers of the legislature, meaning a united party could easily name the next governor.

Pierluisi's main obstacle appeared to be

Senate President Thomas Rivera Schatz, who has said he won't vote for Rossello's nominee and wants to be governor himself. Rivera Schatz is a powerful figure deeply associated with Puerto Rico's political and business elite, and his elevation to governorship could reignite popular outrage.

House and Senate sessions on Pierluisi hadn't started as planned at 11 a.m. Thursday even as ruling party lawmakers met in closed door sessions to seek a solution.

Many Puerto Rican legislators were predicting that Pierluisi did not have the votes to be confirmed.

Dillinger relatives doubt body in grave is the gangster

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Relatives of notorious 1930s gangster John Dillinger who plan to have his remains exhumed say they have "evidence" the body buried in an Indianapolis cemetery beneath a gravestone bearing his name may not be him and FBI agents possibly killed someone else in 1934.

The Indiana State Department of Health released affidavits signed by Mike Thompson and Carol Thompson Griffith, who say Dillinger was their uncle. In the documents, they say they're seeking to have "a body purported to be John H. Dillinger"

exhumed from Crown Hill Cemetery for a forensic analysis and possible DNA testing.

Both say in the affidavits supporting an exhumation and reburial permit the state agency approved in July that they have received "evidence that demonstrates that the individual who was shot and killed at the Biograph Theater in Chicago on July 22, 1934 may not in fact have been my uncle, John H. Dillinger."

In their affidavits, both say that "evidence" includes that the eye color of the man killed outside that theater didn't match Dillinger's eye color, that his ears

were shaped differently, that the fingerprints weren't a match and that he had a heart condition. They say they want the body exhumed and subjected to a forensic analysis and possibly DNA testing "in order to make a positive identification."

"It is my belief and opinion that it is critical to learn whether Dillinger lived beyond his reported date of death of July 22, 1934. If he was not killed on that date, I am interested in discovering what happened to him, where he lived, whether he had children, and whether any such children or grandchildren are living today," both say in the documents.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Trash dumper leaves nod to Guthrie song

MA GREAT BARRINGTON — Whoever dumped trash at the building made famous in Arlo Guthrie's 1967 Thanksgiving protest anthem "Alice's Restaurant Massacre" has a sense of humor.

The director of what's now the Guthrie Center in Great Barrington discovered that someone had filled the dumpster with garbage and left a grubby sofa nearby.

They also left a sign that read, "Officer Obie told me to do it."

The sign was a reference to former Stockbridge Police Chief William Obanhein, the Officer Obie of the song who arrested Guthrie for illegally dumping trash.

Driver cited for fake registration stickers

NE LINCOLN — A Nebraska state trooper cited a driver after pulling over a vehicle that had registration stickers painted onto its license plates.

Nebraska State Patrol spokesman Cody Thomas said the vehicle was stopped in north Lincoln. Trooper Adam Strode spotted the problem, and he ticketed the driver for having fictitious plates and not having valid registration.

It's unclear whether the driver also was the artist whose unsteady hand fashioned two rough red rectangles in the upper right-hand corner of the plates.

Police say drunken man shot his dog

FL CAPE CORAL — Police in Florida said a

man shot his dog while he was intoxicated.

News outlets reported Corey James Potts, 23, was arrested Monday and faces several charges including aggravated animal cruelty.

Cape Coral Police Department Master Sgt. Patrick O'Grady said officers responding to a shots-fired call found a large, light brown mixed-breed dog dead in a vacant lot next to the home. He said Potts came out crying and told police he shot his dog, Gordo.

Witnesses said they saw the dog running around outside before hearing gunshots and seeing Potts lying near the dog.

Boy who saved child honored as a hero

NC ASHEVILLE — Firefighters in North Carolina honored a 9-year-old boy for saving another child from drowning in a pool.

The Asheville Citizen-Times reported Jayden Castillo was presented a Civilian Life-Saving Award by the Asheville Fire Department for rescuing Marlee Shelton, 5.

Castillo was swimming in their complex's pool when Jercovi Jackson, 4, told him Shelton was under water for too long. Castillo said he saw Shelton on his back at the bottom of the pool and dove in. Nearby adults began CPR before emergency services arrived.

Castillo was also awarded a Commissioners' Award of Heroism from the state fire marshal in Raleigh.

Pilot suspected of drinking arrested

MN MINNEAPOLIS — A Delta Air Lines pilot suspected of drinking before his flight at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport

was arrested.

A report by airport police said the pilot had an "alcoholic container" in his possession and was suspected of being impaired. He was scheduled to fly to San Diego.

The Star Tribune reported the pilot, who lives in Rosemount, was released about three hours after his arrest. Airport spokesman Patrick Hogan said the final toxicology results are pending.

Sentence for feeding strays is reviewed

OH GARFIELD HEIGHTS — A judge wants to take a second look at a 10-day jail sentence given to a 79-year-old woman for refusing to stop feeding stray cats in her suburban Cleveland neighborhood.

Cleveland.com reported that Garfield Heights Municipal Court Judge Jennifer Weiler wants to hear the case herself after a jail sentence handed down to Nancy Segula by a city magistrate was widely criticized.

Segula acknowledges repeatedly violating a city ordinance making it illegal for people to feed dogs and cats that aren't their own. She was sentenced to jail after her fourth appearance in court for the violations.

3 ducklings rescued from grate by police

NY NEW YORK — A mother duck and her nine babies were crossing a New York City street when three ducklings fell through a storm grate and had to be retrieved by police.

The rescue happened in the bustling Brooklyn neighborhood of Park Slope.

Witness Lynn Harris told the news site Gothamist people had

noticed the ducks and were following beside them, trying to provide a safe escort when the mother duck was spooked by a dog.

That's when three of the little ones dropped through the grate outside a hospital.

A crowd including animal rescuer Sean Casey gathered to help.

The ducks were taken to a shelter.

Man sets record with 72.8-pound mahi mahi

MD ANNAPOLIS — A Maryland man who said he had to outlast a mahi mahi to land it now has a place in the state record book.

The state Department of Natural Resources said Jeff Wright, of Cambridge, broke a 34-year-old fishing record when he caught the 72.8-pound fish off the coast of Ocean City. Wright's catch beat the record held by Kim Lawson, who reeled in a 67.8-pound common dolphinfish in July 1985.

Wright said in a news release that he fought the fish for 25 minutes and had to stay with it until it finally gave up.

Yellowstone sets snowmobiling lottery

WY YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK — People can now apply for permits to snowmobile in Yellowstone National Park without a commercial guide during the next winter season.

Under a special lottery program, the park allows one group of up to five snowmobiles to enter Yellowstone from each of its four winter entrances per day.

Successful applicants will be notified in mid-September.

From wire reports

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Astros acquire ace Greinke at deadline

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Out of nowhere, the Houston Astros got a huge head start on October.

On a dizzying day that featured two dozen trades, the Astros pulled off the biggest and most startling deal, adding ace Zack Greinke to an imposing rotation already loaded with All-Stars Justin Verlander and Gerrit Cole.

After pulling off the deal, Houston general manager Jeff Luhnow surveyed the stunned room in a bit of a daze.

"I can't believe we just added Zack Greinke to this rotation and this team," Luhnow said, sharing the thought he had as he completed the trade.

Luhnow orchestrated the swap to bring the six-time All-Star who won the 2009 AL Cy Young Award to Houston from Arizona in exchange for four minor leaguers as the headliner of a flurry of trades he made Wednesday to beef up the talented squad.

Houston also acquired two other pitchers, getting starter Aaron Sanchez and reliever Joe Biagini from Toronto and bringing back catcher Martin Maldonado, who spent the last 41 games with the team in 2018, from the Cubs.

Luhnow said getting Greinke became a possibility only in the last two days and talks for the veteran right-hander didn't really heat up until the final 24 hours.

"I wasn't sure it was going to happen, and throughout the afternoon there was times I thought it was dead and times I thought it was 50/50, but at no point did I think it was over 50/50," he said. "And then when it all came together we just looked at each other in the room and said, 'Is this really happening?' We kind of had to pinch ourselves."

The 2017 World Series champs were in the market for another starter as the rotation behind their top three has

performed inconsistently this season. The Arizona ace is 10-4 with a 2.87 ERA in 22 starts this season and provides a pronounced upgrade over the variety of players they've cycled through to start behind Verlander, Cole and Wade Miley this season.

Arizona agreed to send Houston \$24 million to offset much of the \$74,161,290 Greinke is owed in salary plus \$2 million to cover the assignment bonus he gets for being traded. The Diamondbacks pay the Astros \$2 million on Nov. 1 for the assignment bonus and pay Houston \$3,333,333 on Oct. 15 plus \$10,333,333 each on July 1 in 2020 and 2021.

Greinke's \$206.5 million, six-year contract includes a \$31.5 million salary for this year — which has \$10,161,290 remaining — plus \$32 million in each of the next two seasons. His deal defers \$10.5 million in 2019 salary and \$11 million in each of the next two years, and Houston assumes responsibility for the deferred money being accrued starting Thursday.

Luhnow said it was difficult to give up four top prospects to snag the 35-year-old Greinke, but that he and owner Jim Crane believed they needed to be aggressive to upgrade this team, even though it has a comfortable lead atop the AL West.

"Every year going forward there's going to be multiple good players reaching free agency so you just don't know when you're going to assemble a group this talented again," Luhnow said. "So you have to take advantage of that and that's something Jim believes in and so do I. It's a balancing act ... but we are definitely going for it this year."

Greinke's addition gives the Astros four starting pitchers with ERAs in the top 15 in the majors this year. Verlander is fifth with a 2.73 ERA, Greinke is ninth, Cole is 11th at 2.94 and Wade Miley ranks 14th at 3.06.

Contenders make moves with focus on postseason

Associated Press

While the Astros' acquisition of pitcher Zack Greinke from Arizona for four minor leaguers became the talk of baseball, plenty of familiar names were on the go Wednesday — Shane Greene and Mark Melancon boosted the Braves' bullpen, with Scooter Gennett, Jesus Aguilar, Mike Leake and Tanner Roark among those also moving.

"Houston made some big deals. They're really good. They were good before," Red Sox President of Baseball Operations Dave Dombrowski said.

A lot of contenders were busy.

The Chicago Cubs added Detroit's Nicholas Castellanos to their lineup, the Phillies got outfielder Corey Dickerson from Pittsburgh and the Washington Nationals acquired relievers Daniel Hudson, Roenis Elias and Hunter Strickland.

In most cases, major leaguers were swapped for prospects.

"When it comes to trades, one thing I've learned is, just wait," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "You've got to wait until the very end and it plays itself out. The 11th hour is the most powerful hour there is. To get things done before that, it normally doesn't work to get what you want. There's the 11th hour at work."

Several players whose names swirled in the tradewinds stayed put.

Giants ace Madison Bumgarner, Mets starters Noah Syndergaard and Zack Wheeler and Pirates closer Felipe Vazquez remained in place. So did Mets closer Edwin Diaz and Texas starter Mike Minor.

"Nothing changed for me. I never expected to be somewhere else until that happened," Bumgarner said. "I just have a job to do and I'm going to do it."

Major League Baseball made July 31 a hard deadline this year for trades — no deals can be made until after the World Series.

"This was a unique dead-

line, it felt," said Yankees general manager Brian Cashman, whose AL East-leading team didn't make any significant moves.

Pitchers Marcus Stroman, Andrew Cashner, Homer Bailey and Jason Vargas were among the players traded in recent weeks.

And on Tuesday night, the Cleveland Indians agreed to send pitcher Trevor Bauer to Cincinnati in a three-team swap that landed outfielder Yasiel Puig. That trade became official Wednesday, setting off a full morning and afternoon of swaps.

Wheeler heard the speculation involving him.

"It's almost happened several times and never did. I'm happy to be here and I'm concentrating on producing and doing well here," he said. "It was all there for it to happen and just didn't. I was ready for it, especially with me being a free agent after the season."

Atlanta concentrated its effort on padding its bullpen.

A day after getting reliever Chris Martin from Texas, the Braves got Greene from Detroit and Melancon from the Giants.

"We engaged everything — position players, starting pitchers, the bullpen — right up until the end," general manager Alex Anthopoulos said. "At the end of the day, where we thought there were deals that made sense for us and what we had to give up and so on, the bullpen made the most sense. But we definitely tried some other areas. We just couldn't wind up with a deal that made sense to our organization."

The 30-year-old Greene has 22 saves and 1.18 ERA and was an All-Star this season. He's likely to take over the closer's role — Luke Jackson had been the latest to try it for the Braves, and was just 17-for-25 in save chances.

"They're excited, I'm excited," Greene said in Anaheim, where the Tigers played the Los Angeles Angels. "I'm starting a new chapter and going to a contender."

Toronto rookie Bichette hits first HR

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Bo Bichette's first career homer helped lead the Toronto Blue Jays to a three-game sweep of the Kansas City Royals.

Bichette's big moment came at the start of the eighth inning against Royals starter Jakob Junis, when his drive cleared the left-center field wall in the 4-1 win on Wednesday. Freddy Galvis also hit a crucial solo shot to center in the seventh that was his 16th homer of the season.

Bichette made his major league debut here Monday.

"After the first game was over, I was able to say, 'OK, my career has started,' and then treat it like any other normal day," Bichette said. "He got me out on two sliders the first two at-bats and I made an adjustment and I hit it really hard."

Galvis' homer, which gave the Blue Jays a 2-1 lead, surprised Junis.

"He kind of dove out over the plate to get

it and scooped it up and got it in the air," Junis said. "I thought Bubba (Starling) might have a chance on the warning track or something but it just kept carrying out."

Cavan Biggio followed Bichette's homer with a double, ending Junis' outing. Reliever Kevin McCarthy surrendered a run-scoring double to Teoscar Hernandez.

Rookie Jacob Waguespack (2-1) went six innings for his second win in his fourth big-league start. He held the Royals to three hits and one run. Cam Gallagher barely cleared the left-field bullpen fence for his second homer, drilling a 2-2 pitch from Waguespack to open the third inning.

Junis (6-10) was cruising for much of the game, retiring the side on eight pitches each in the second, third and fourth innings. But the Jays got even it at 1-1 in the sixth as Biggio walked, stole second and scored on Justin Smoak's single.

"The first pitch (of the game) was probably the worst pitch in the seven innings that Junis threw — to Bichette was a fast-

ball kind of high and over the middle of the plate and he hit the double down the line. But after that he was really good," Royals manager Ned Yost said.

Waguespack got exceptional defensive help early. Deep outfield catches by Lourdes Gurriel Jr. in left and Randal Grichuk in center prevented extra-base hits by Jorge Soler in the first inning and Hunter Dozier in the third. Smoak speared Ryan O'Hearn's hot shot to start a double play in the fourth and Gurriel charged in for a shoetop grab of Nicky Lopez's weak liner to end the inning.

"I didn't throw as many strikes as I wanted to but luckily the balls that were hit were at guys," Waguespack said. "The defense did a heck of a job."

Right after his last catch, however, Gurriel left the game with a sore right knee.

Rookie Justin Shafer worked a perfect ninth for his first career save.

MLB roundup

Donaldson, Braves top Nats, pad East lead

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Josh Donaldson gave the Atlanta Braves a little more breathing room in the National League East.

Donaldson homered against Sean Doolittle in the top of the 10th inning, and the Braves pulled out a 5-4 victory over the Washington Nationals on Wednesday to take two of three in the series and pad their division lead to 6½ games.

"It felt good," Donaldson said. "You know, 0-for-4 with two [strikeouts] before that. I was able to put a good swing together and help our team win the game."

After the Nationals scored twice in the bottom of the ninth to tie the game, Donaldson swatted a fastball from Doolittle (6-3) over the center-field wall for his 25th homer of the season.

"I know what he features," Donaldson said of the Washington closer and his former teammate on the Oakland A's. "He had gotten me out two times before that. Today, it was my

turn."

Shortly after Donaldson homered, the Braves bolstered their roster with a pair of trades just before the 4 p.m. deadline, acquiring relievers Shane Greene and Mark Melancon.

Adam Duvall homered for the fourth time in five games. Ronald Acuna Jr., Ozzie Albies and Tyler Flowers also drove in runs for the Braves, who went 4-2 on a road trip through Philadelphia and Washington, their top challengers for the NL East title.

Yankees 7, Diamondbacks 5: Austin Romine hit a go-ahead, two-run homer in the seventh inning and host New York beat Arizona while the Diamondbacks completed a deal to send ace Zack Greinke to Houston.

Indians 10, Astros 4: Roberto Perez homered twice, Carlos Santana and Jason Kipnis each hit a three-run shot and host Cleveland capped a power-packed day with a win over Houston.

Reds 4, Pirates 1: Clint Hurdle and David Bell had lit-

tle interaction while exchanging lineup cards one day after their teams fought on the field, and the two teams were on good behavior during host Cincinnati's victory over Pittsburgh behind a strong outing from Luis Castillo.

Cubs 2, Cardinals 0: Kyle Hendricks struck out seven in seven innings and Ian Happ hit an RBI single in the sixth inning to break a scoreless tie as visiting Chicago beat St. Louis and moved into a tie with the Cardinals atop the NL Central.

Rangers 9, Mariners 7: All-Star lefty Mike Minor won for the first time in more than a month, Shin-Soo Choo hit a solo homer and host Texas beat Seattle.

Dodgers 5, Rockies 1: Will Smith hit a three-run home run in the ninth inning to break open a scoreless game and lead visiting Los Angeles.

Rays 8, Red Sox 5: Kevin Kiermaier homered on the first pitch he saw after coming off the injured list, and Austin Meadows hit a three-run shot to lead visiting Tampa Bay.

Tigers 9, Angels 1: Jake Rogers, Brandon Dixon and Gordon Beckham went deep, Daniel Norris picked up his first win since May 12 and visiting Detroit swept the three-game series.

Twins 7, Marlins 4: Jose Berrios struck out a season-high 11 in seven innings and Minnesota hit three homers in a win over host Miami.

Giants 5, Phillies 1: Jeff Samardzija tossed three-hit ball over six scoreless innings, Buster Posey, Pablo Sandoval and Kevin Pillar homered in a five-run fifth and shorthanded San Francisco beat host Philadelphia.

Mets 4, White Sox 2: Todd Frazier hit a tiebreaking single in the ninth inning, Michael Conforto added a two-run single and New York beat host Chicago for its season-best sixth straight victory.

Brewers 4, Athletics 2: Lorenzo Cain hit a lead-off homer and Jordan Lyles pitched well in his return to the Milwaukee Brewers, earning a win over host Oakland.

Vikings looking for No. 3 wide receiver

Associated Press

EAGAN, Minn. — No pair of teammates last season totaled more than the 215 combined catches amassed by Adam Thielen and Stefon Diggs for Minnesota.

With Thielen and Diggs, the Vikings were also one of only four teams with two members of the 1,000-yard club last year. They ought to be set then at wide receiver, right, with those time-worn training camp competitions for playing time mostly taking place at other positions?

Well, not so much in the passing-oriented NFL these days, a necessity of having at least three starting-caliber players available the Vikings were reminded of during the fade by the offense during the second half of last season.

So even though they can lean on established excellence at the top of their wide receiver depth chart, the Vikings have likewise embarked this summer on a critical task of developing the rest of the group so another go-to target can emerge for quarterback Kirk Cousins.

For Chad Beebe, Jordan Taylor, Laquon Treadwell, Brandon Zylstra and a handful of

under-the-radar rookies, the opportunity is, no pun intended, wide open.

“I think it’s a great mix of talent in that room. They come in all shapes and sizes, so we kind of just try to focus on what the guys do well,” offensive coordinator Kevin Stefanski said.

If draft picks automatically panned out the way teams projected them to, this spot would already be sewn up by Treadwell. The 2016 first-round selection has struggled with injuries and confidence over his first three years and not displayed enough speed and instinct to consistently run open routes. Though Treadwell posted career bests in 2018 with 35 receptions and 302 yards and one touchdown last season, the willingness of Cousins to throw his way on key plays was not rewarded with nearly enough production.

Beebe, just as Thielen did six years ago, landed on the practice squad after using the rookie tryout camp to latch on in the spring. Then he was elevated to the active roster and caught three passes in his debut against Detroit before missing four games with a hamstring injury. Though he’s only 5-

foot-10, his skills have flashed enough potential to stay firmly in the mix for a significant role in the new scheme under Stefanski and offensive adviser Gary Kubiak.

“My strengths revolve around my quick twitch. I’m not the biggest guy. I’m not the fastest straight-line guy,” Beebe said. “But side to side I can move pretty well.”

Zylstra, who like Thielen is a native of Minnesota, came from the CFL last year and made the team out of training camp as, primarily, a special teams coverage man. He was removed Monday from the physically unable to perform list, after recovering from a hamstring injury, putting himself back into the competition.

As for the transition from the longer and wider playing surface in Canada, well, that proved to be steeper than he anticipated.

“That just speeds up all the players, just putting everybody in a tighter environment,” Zylstra said. “It speeds everybody up, so when you come out of your breaks, it always seems like there’s a defender in your face, versus the CFL where you had a little bit of space to

work.”

Taylor signed as a free agent, after spending four years with Denver. Double hip surgeries kept him off the field for the entire 2018 season, but the 6-foot-5 Taylor has brought prior knowledge of the concepts and preferences that Kubiak has infused into the system, having played under him with the Broncos.

“It obviously is an advantage, for sure. These other guys are doing a great job of learning the offense as well, but just being able to play multiple positions if need be, I think, can only help you,” Taylor said.

Seventh-round draft picks Olabisi Johnson and Dillon Mitchell have joined undrafted rookies Davion Davis and Alexander Hollins and second-year speedster Jeff Badet in the deep end of the pool.

“They have not been precise enough in these first couple days, these young receivers,” Zimmer said Sunday. “They need to get their rear end in gear.”

For everyone in the mix except perhaps Treadwell, the first-rounder, there is plenty of motivation to become the next Thielen or Diggs.

Former Olympian Wagner details sexual assault

Associated Press

Former Olympian Ashley Wagner says she was sexually assaulted by another figure skater in 2008 when she 17.

The three-time national champion wrote in USA Today on Thursday that John Coughlin climbed into her bed after a party at a skating camp and began kissing and groping her. Coughlin was 22 at the time and took his life in January at 33.

Wagner says she was “absolutely paralyzed in fear.”

Wagner won an Olympic team bronze medal in 2014 and is now retired from competitive skating. She says she feared speaking out earlier be-

cause she competes in a sport where judges determine success. She told the newspaper two factors helped change her mind — the emergence of the #MeToo movement and Coughlin’s coaching suspension in January by the U.S. Center for SafeSport, an organization dedicated to protecting young athletes from abuse.

USA Today also reported that Coughlin’s former pairs partner from 2004-07, Bridget Namiotka, posted on Facebook in May that Coughlin “sexually abused” her for two years.

Wagner said that soon after that night in 2008 she told two people close to her about what happened.

USA Today spoke to one of those, who confirmed her account but was not identified because of the “sensitivity of the topic.” Wagner said she spoke with officials at U.S. Figure Skating in February.

In a USFS statement released to the newspaper, spokeswoman Barbara Reichert said:

“What happened to Ashley should not happen to anyone, period. Ashley is incredibly strong; not just to have the courage to come forward with her story, but to share her experience publicly to help others. Ashley recently spoke at U.S. Figure Skating athlete safety seminars and her experience and message of empowerment

had a profound impact on skaters and their parents.”

The U.S. Center for SafeSport and the figure skating federation had begun investigating allegations lodged against Coughlin late last year. They found enough evidence to warrant an interim suspension barring him from attending activities sanctioned by the U.S. Olympic Committee. Coughlin had become a coach and TV commentator after retiring from skating.

Coughlin maintained his innocence throughout the investigations. He was found dead Jan. 18 at his father’s home in Kansas City, Mo.